

# Papua New Guinea

---

 [freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/papua-new-guinea](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/papua-new-guinea)

## Freedom of the Press

News media in Papua New Guinea (PNG) have traditionally been among the strongest and most independent in the South Pacific, but press freedom has eroded somewhat in the past three years. Freedom of speech, the press, and information are guaranteed under Section 46 of the constitution. Journalists can be sued for defamation in civil cases, but it is not a criminal offense. In May 2013, Prime Minister Peter O'Neill filed a defamation suit against opposition leader Belden Namah and a reporter from television station EMTV for corruption accusations. Namah also claimed that O'Neill threatened to revoke the station's broadcasting license, although the prime minister denied the allegation. The case was ongoing at year's end. PNG does not have an access to information law.

The Media Council of Papua New Guinea (MCPNG) serves as a buffer against government pressure by lobbying for media freedom, managing a complaints process, and undertaking media research. The council also has a well-developed code of ethics, which member journalists follow. However, the MCPNG's executive director, Nimo Kama, was suspended in June 2011 after an independent audit of Australian government funding to the organization found evidence of fraud. The future of the council remained in limbo in 2013.

Threats and harassment against journalists and attempts to interfere with their work occur occasionally, particularly in reprisal for investigative reporting on corruption issues. Throughout 2013, there were mounting concerns over secrecy and intimidation of journalists attempting to report on the reactivated detention center for migrants on Manus Island. Staffed by the British private security agency GS4, the center, where over 1,000 asylum seekers trying to reach Australia are detained, has been condemned by human rights groups for its harsh conditions. In November, journalists faced harassment and other obstacles for reporting on the government's takeover of the Ok Tedi copper mine, located near the Indonesian border. During the controversy, the Australian media adviser for the Papua New Guinea Sustainable Development Program (PNGSDP) was deported. In addition, three senior journalists with the state-owned National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) were demoted under pressure from the government because of their reporting about mining policies and allegations of corruption.

In November 2013, the Australian Associated Press (AAP) news agency announced that it was closing down its bureau in PNG, ending a 60-year presence. Media commentators criticized the move, warning of serious implications for press freedom in the country. Correspondents working for AAP have often released major stories and carried out investigations that have not been matched by local outlets. Other news agencies have relied on stringers to cover PNG, with occasional visits by reporters.

Both of the country's daily newspapers are foreign owned. The *Post-Courier* is owned by an Australian subsidiary of the U.S.-based News Corporation, while the *National*, which now has a larger circulation than its older rival, is owned by the Malaysian logging company Rimbunan Hijau. Broadcast media consist of the main public broadcaster, the NBC; several major commercial radio networks, such as Nau FM and FM 100; and the main private television station, EMTV. A number of private outlets are owned by Fiji-based companies. Radio is an important source of news due to the country's isolated settlements and low literacy rates. According to a media monitoring website, radio news services in PNG are seen as leading the fight against endemic corruption, whereas newspapers are alleged to have been compromised by corporate interests. The government does not restrict access to the internet, but lack of infrastructure limited

penetration to less than 7 percent of the population in 2013.

## **2014 Scores**

### **Press Status**

Free

### **Press Freedom Score**

**(0 = best, 100 = worst)**

29

### **Legal Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

6

### **Political Environment**

**(0 = best, 40 = worst)**

13

### **Economic Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

10